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Marie Anne  
Chiment**

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# Extravaganza Production Design

George Lucas' *Super Live Adventure* draws on the producer-director's entire body of work, including his films *Star Wars* and *Willow* (photos, this page and opposite). Production designer Douglas W. Schmidt researched the project by visiting the Lucas archives at Skywalker Ranch and seeing other arena shows. He designed a large circle, 60' in diameter, backed by a proscenium wall 120' across, for the main playing area. Frank Krenz's costume designs (sketches, facing page and on the following two pages) are a mixture of original designs and copies from the Lucas films.

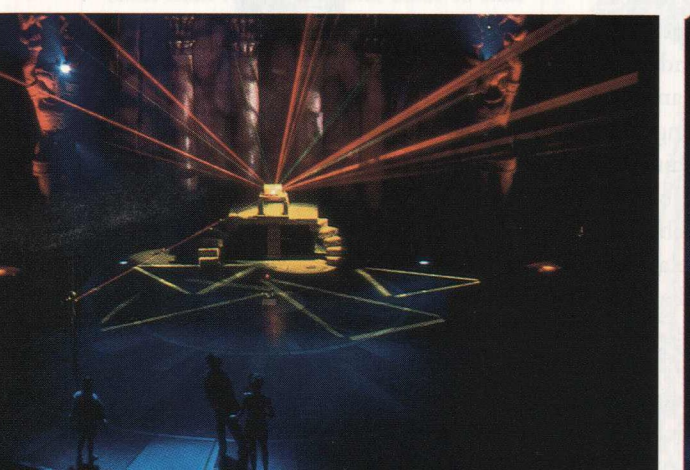
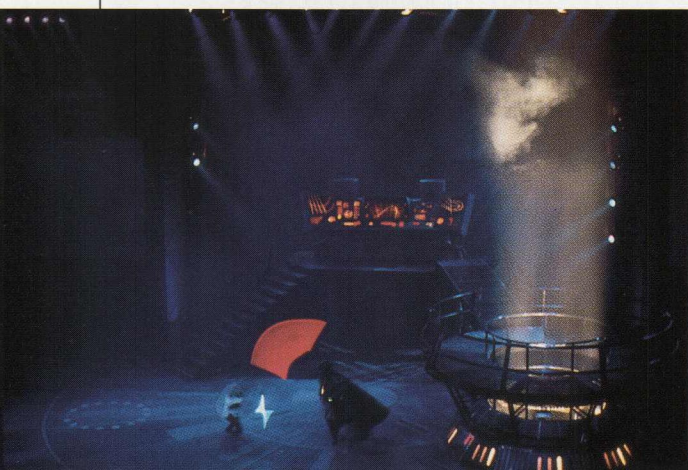
ALL PHOTOS: GUY LAWSON



By Karl G. Ruling



An arena tour celebrates a filmmaker's body of work



# GEORGE LUCAS' SUPER LIVE ADVENTURE



**G**eorge Lucas' *Super Live Adventure*, publicized as the largest touring show ever produced, opened in April 27 in

Yokohama for a 22-week tour of four Japanese cities. The arena show has been billed as a three-dimensional, multi-sensory family-entertainment spectacular that features live action, drama, dancing, stunts, and music. Sponsored by a consortium of Japanese television corporations, the show was budgeted at \$25 million, which went to pay for assembling a cast of 60 and almost as large a backstage staff, as well as a laser gun battle with real lasers, a flying Millennium Falcon, a booby-trapped Ark of the Covenant, a live tiger, a 100kW sound system, and perhaps the largest PanCommand lighting system ever. The show may have a life after the Japanese tour is over as an international tour or a permanent attraction somewhere in the United States.

"It's not just a concert. It's not just a stunt show. It's not a musical—but it

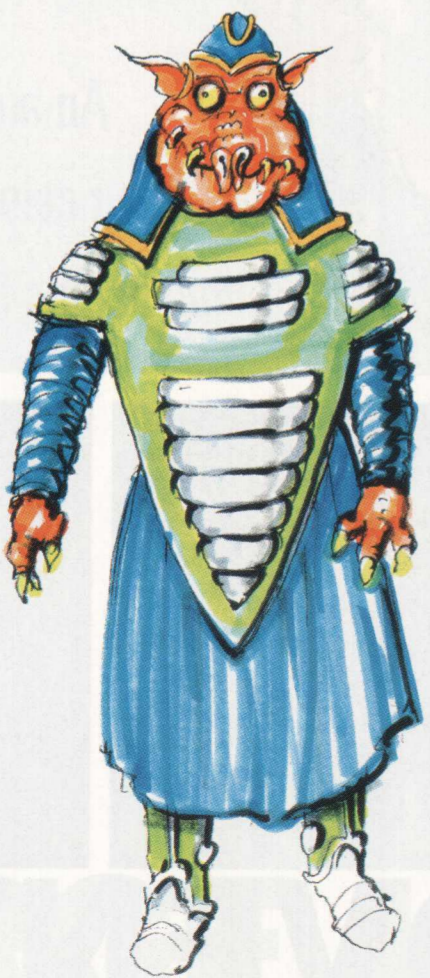


has elements of everything," explains Scott Faris, director and supervising producer. The production was launched about two and a half years ago when the Lucas organization approached Kenneth Feld with the idea of creating a tour of artifacts of the *Star Wars* and *Indiana Jones* movies in celebration of the 20th anniversary of Lucasfilm, Ltd. Feld is the chairman of Irvin Feld & Kenneth Feld Productions, Inc., producers of the Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Circus, Siegfried & Roy's magic show at the Mirage in Las Vegas, and Walt Disney's World on Ice. Faris and Feld met with George Lucas in the fall of 1990, and came up with the outline of the show.

"He [Feld] knew that we wanted to do an arena format show," remembers Faris. "We wanted it to be something spectacular. We did not want to recreate the films. We wanted to involve the



audience—and we went from there." The show is the story of a Japanese girl who must find a hero to save her people from the Dark Side of the Force. In the process she experiences scenes from *Willow*, *American Graffiti*, the *Indiana Jones* series, *Tucker*, and the *Star Wars* trilogy—almost the entire George Lucas canon—and ultimately discovers the hero within herself. Clips from the Lucas films are shown on two giant screens flanking the stage to cover scene shifts and link the scenes to the movies. "The idea was to create scenes that had the spirit of the movies, but with the action happening live, and do it with as many state-of-the-art effects as you can." The scenes are not recreations of the movie scenes, "because you don't want people to see the show and say, 'Well, I've already seen this in the movies.'"



Production designer Douglas W. Schmidt explains that the summer of 1992 was spent doing research for the project by visiting the Lucas archives at Skywalker Ranch and seeing other arena shows. "We went to see the Hammer concert. We went to see Paula Abdul. We went to see whatever was on the road during the summer, just to see how people were dealing with big spaces. I had never worked in an arena format before, and neither had Scott, and so we wanted to experience it and see what was successful and what was not. It was very informative, and we left with an appreciation of what you have to do to involve a huge mass of people.

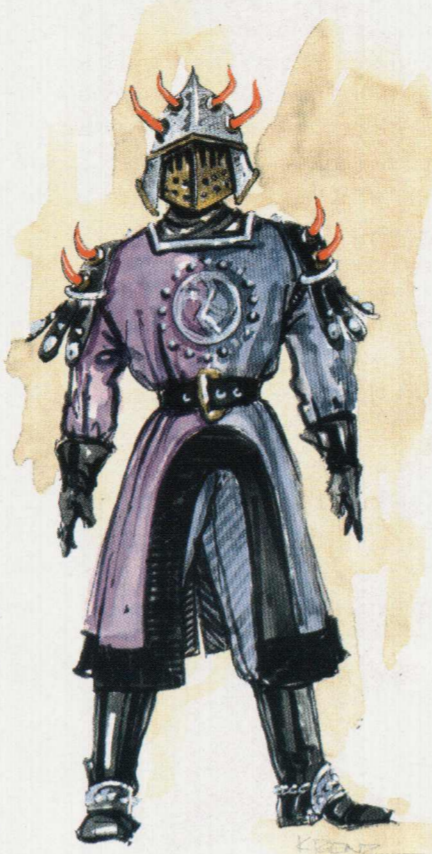
"It really is a question of scale and how you handle that," says Schmidt. "We have the double whammy of not only having a big space to fill, but we also have the Lucas oeuvre to emulate, which is so much larger than life that you're almost obliged in a space like this to heighten it even further. That, I think, is really the trick to the whole thing: how far can you go before it becomes impractical for the situation?"



And indeed, I think we have pushed the envelope.

"The design, in truth, was a lot of problem-solving," adds Schmidt. "The script virtually presents a trick a minute, some gag that has to be dealt with. There is never a moment where two characters sit on a sofa and talk about life. Rocket ships land and spears come out of the stage and things fall down and blow up. The machine is designed to fulfill those functions."

The theatrical machine Schmidt designed is huge. The main playing space is a large circle, 60' in diameter, backed by a proscenium wall 120' across. "It's so big, there was no way to build what you would call a traditional half-inch scale model," says Schmidt, who notes that the stage is 5' off the arena floor. "You want to get the show high enough so that kids sitting on the flat floor can see over the people in front of them, so they can look up and



see Luke Skywalker." He adds that the stage "really had to be this high because of all the equipment that's underneath it. We were concerned that a shorter audience would have trouble seeing over the edge of the deck, but there was really no way to do the show without doing it [that way]."

Schmidt also laid out the star-shaped lighting truss system, but the lighting was designed by Marilyn Lowey. The show is a combination of drama, musical, and science fiction, so Lowey had to have a flexible system to accommodate all the different scenes. The PanCommand truss system holds 60 PC Spots, 180 PC Beams, seven Telescans®, four Lycian followspots, and a few conventional PAR cans with ColorFader color changers.

The unique design of the PanCommand trusses helps make the theatrical machine work. The truss sides protect the luminaires during shipping, but hinge up when the trusses are



hung to form handrails for a catwalk on the top of truss. The catwalk lets the trolls in the *Willow* scene climb along the trusses and then enter by climbing down ropes. Several PC Spots mounted in a footlight position at the periphery of the circular thrust light the ape-like creatures from *Willow* as they descend from the grid and come in handy for the musical numbers.

"It's a great angle for any show," says Lowey. "Somehow you always end up using it, and it gives you a very different look. You can do big, sweeping changes, like we did in [the sequence from] *Tucker*. We thought about sinking footlights into the deck, but there's so much stuff under the deck. We've got illusions and pyro. I've never seen a smoke system like this before!"

Lowey's lighting design is large-scale too. She tends to use the PC Spots and PC Beams *en masse* to pick out the performers onstage. The instruments are "always paired, so I turn on two," says Lowey. "Sometimes there are eights and 10s when the action calls for it. Besides the fact that I have to light for the person who is



sitting up in God's country, I'd rather put up four [instruments] in a darker color than two in a lighter color so that it has some kind of substance and scale and presence to it. You're lighting a football field here! I don't know how some other designer would handle it; I just can't live with a couple of lights."

Costume designer Frank Krenz (whose designs are seen on these pages) had to deal with more constraints on his designs than did Lowey. "Some of [the costumes] we had to copy because of the film clips in the show," says Krenz's assistant Jim Hammer. "We see the character on the screen and then we see him onstage, so it had to be a copy—but a lot are original designs by Frank."

The costumes for the chorus in the *Tucker* sequence are an invention of



Krenz's. The dancing sequence in the film is short, the female dancers are few, and the women wear peach gowns. In *Super Live Adventure*, the *Tucker* scene is an extended, high-energy, musical number, and demure peach gowns would not do. Krenz took his inspiration for the costumes from the *Tucker* automobile, with its chrome trim and cherry metal-flake paint.

The alien stripper costume in the *Star Wars* cantina is also a new creation of Krenz's. The stripper looks like a beautiful woman, but during her act she removes her skin as well as her clothes and reveals herself as an alien. "Very tricky. The more you think about it, the more impossible it gets," says Krenz. "I had to enlarge the scale of [the actress] as a human being all over.



I had to make her taller, fatter, wider. That was a problem for the poor actress. She had worked for 15 years to be as skinny as she could be, and was just horrified that she was turning into this Mae West!"

Krenz also had to deal with quick changes for many of the performers. "I tried to be pragmatic about it, but I didn't really have to sacrifice the design too much," says Krenz. "You have to make the design first, and then figure out how to quick-change it. If you start trying to think of a quick-change design, then you start watering it down." Some of the costumes could not be specially rigged for changes. "Madmartigan's [a villain from the film *Willow*] armor was kind of monstrous. But that armor has to be really very practical in that he has to do incredible fights in it. You can't start velcroing it and snapping it and stuff, because it will just fall off him in the middle of the stage. He really does have to be buckled into it, so you just have to work out a ballet backstage to get him in."

Some of the costumes that looked like copies of those in the Lucas films



were also not exact copies. "All of that stuff from *Star Wars* was based on the original sculpt from the movies, but they had to be modified," says Krenz. "The storm troopers don't look any different. Just the ventilating is different," explains Hammer. "With a lot of the *Star Wars* costumes we've had to modify them to get [the performers] more air, because you can't call 'cut' and take the head off."

The performers do not have to worry about speaking their lines clearly while wearing masks or helmets because the dialogue as well as the sound effects and music are digitally prerecorded and played back. The dialogue tracks were recorded by the same actors who dub the Lucas films in Japan, and were stored on track 8 of two Dawn hard-drive units with a total capacity of seven gigabytes. Sound effects like whip cracks and laser pistol



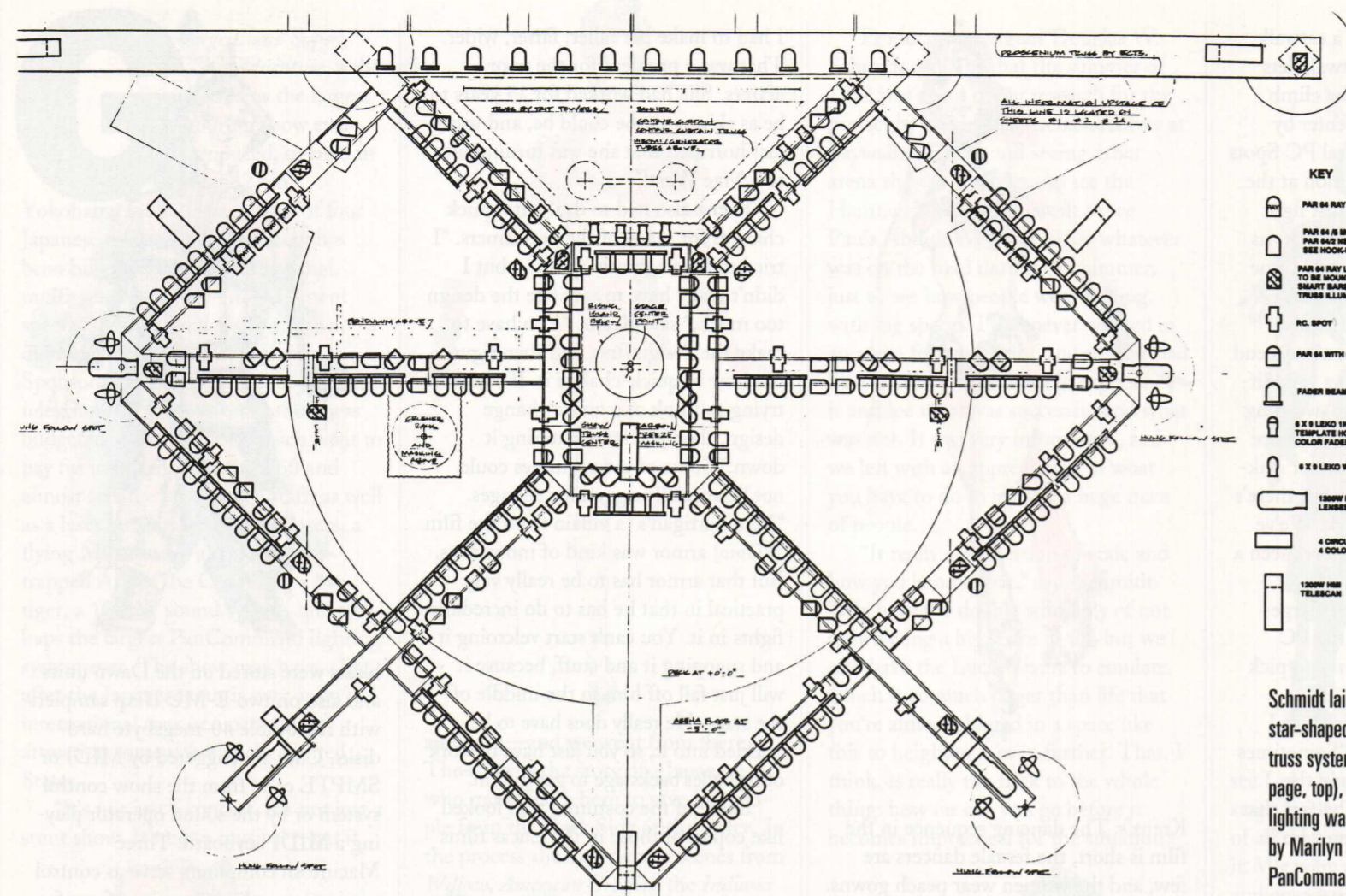
blasts were stored on the Dawn units and also on two E-MU IIIxp samplers with removable 40-megabyte hard-disks. Cues are triggered by MIDI or SMPTE code from the show control system or by the sound operator playing a MIDI keyboard. Three Macintosh computers serve as control computers and operator interfaces for various parts of the system. Two Panasonic 3900 DAT machines provide a real-time backup in case the hard drives crash during the show.

"This show has a strange system configuration," says sound designer Jonathan Deans. "It's 16 into eight into 24 outputs. A normal theatre configuration is usually 40 into eight into eight. We don't need 40, because everything is on hard drives." The relatively large number of outputs is needed to drive the various speaker subsystems used to localize the apparent sources of the sound and provide coverage for the large seating areas in the different arenas.

Level control is handled by a

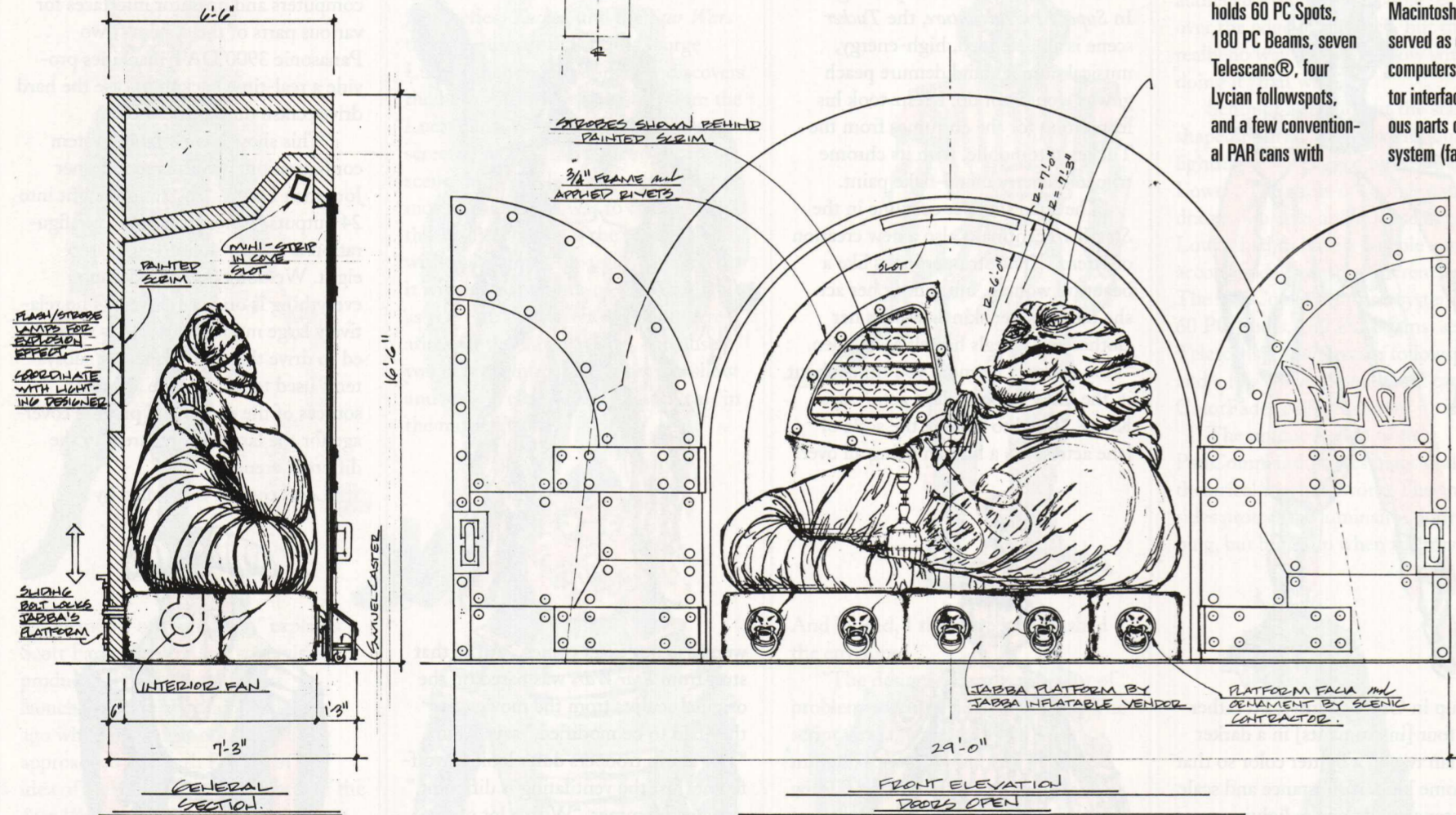






- KEY**
- PAR 48 RAY BEAMS
  - PAR 48 8 SPC. 10W PAR 48 RAY NEW SEE HOODUP
  - PAR 48 RAY LIGHT TO BE HOODUP ABOVE SMART BARS TO PROVIDE INTERNAL TRUSS ILLUMINATION
  - NO SPOT
  - PAR 48 WITH COLOR PAPER
  - FADER BEAM
  - 8 X 8 LEDS NEW WITH TEMPLATE HOLDER & COLOR PAPER
  - 8 X 8 LEDS WITH TEMPLATE NEW
  - 1000MM HUB LUCIAN LENSER TRD
  - 4 CONDUIT RAY CYC 100W 4 COLORS
  - 1000MM HUB TELESCAN
  - HUB POLICE BEACON
  - DATA FLASH

Schmidt laid out the star-shaped lighting truss system (this page, top), but the lighting was designed by Marilyn Lowey. The PanCommand truss holds 60 PC Spots, 180 PC Beams, seven Telescans®, four Lycian followspots, and a few conventional PAR cans with ColorFader color changers. One of Schmidt's more startling effects is a large, inflatable Jabba the Hutt (this page, bottom). Three Macintosh computers served as control computers and operator interfaces for various parts of the sound system (facing page).



Ramsa mixer and an automated Level Control System developed by Deans. The LCS "will automate everything except EQ for you," says Deans. "It will do the level changes, the cross switches. On this system, you are able to completely reconfigure your matrix from one cue to another. In about a tenth of a second you can completely reconfigure your system."

The system uses Meyer speakers and the Meyer SIM system. "As the audience is coming in, we're going to be SIMming for each different house, so we can maintain consistency," says Deans. "Even though it's not a live show, it's

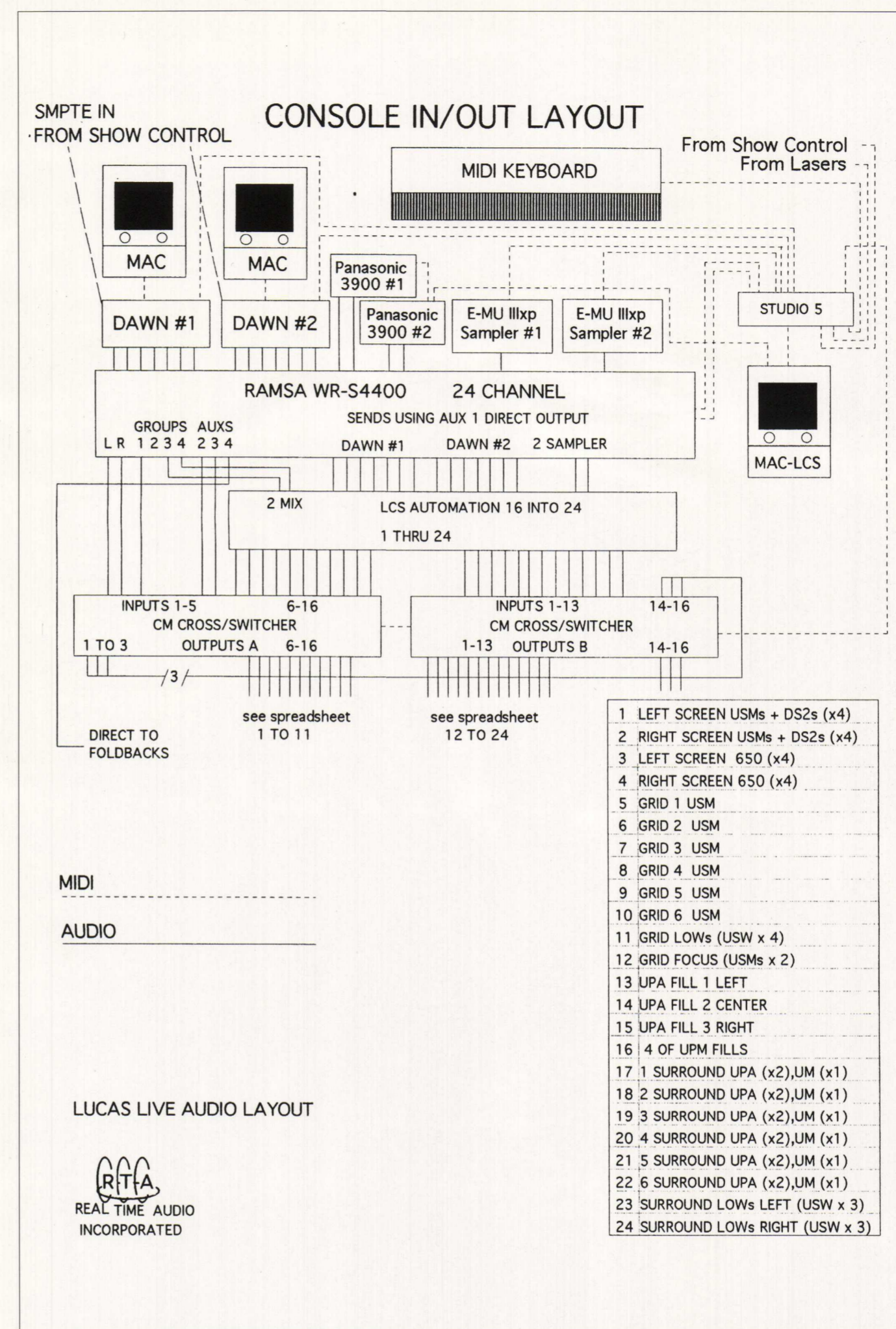
still important that our system is tuned." The SIM system is used with BSS Vari-Curve FCS-926 and FCS-920 equalizers and slave modules. The equalizers have several memories for storing preset equalization curves, and Deans can select whether to use a curve that gives a flat system response according to the SIM system or pick a curve that distorts the frequency response for a particular effect. Twelve BSS TCS 804 two-in by four-out delays are used "so we can delay every group of speakers as we desire," says Deans. "We can also turn sections of speakers on and off, do different EQ changes and time-delay changes by the

LCS, because they receive MIDI and respond in real-time—which we're doing during the show."

MIDI show control is used to synchronize the sound, moving scenery, motion picture projectors, lights, smoke, pyro, and lasers. "The show control system is not only being used as a theatrical and a theme-park-type system, meaning that it's both manually cued and automated, but we're also using the system itself for life safety," says Damon Wootten, president of the Golder Group, suppliers and designers of the system. "Human safety has been the big concern down here—and, of course,

real-time operation." The safety of the system was perhaps most tested by the laser battle from *Star Wars* in which real lasers are fired at actors standing between the lasers and the audience and pyrotechnic charges are set off to simulate laser hits.

"We're using Coherent Skylight 400s, producing close to 40W of argon blue-green power, and a red krypton laser producing about 8W of red," explains Shelton Oliver, engineering manager for Image Engineering and project manager on the show. "Everything onstage is fiber-optic fed. There are five hand-held laser guns that



are operator-controlled, and then we have five remote scan heads." The remote scan heads work like machine guns strafing the stage during the battle. Mirrors reflect the laser beams to create ricochet effects and generally add to the mayhem.

Approximately 15 targets around the stage will detonate a pyrotechnic charge when shot. For safety, several things must happen at once to make the gun shoot the laser beam and cause the charge to fire. First, the actor has to pull the trigger. Second, an infrared sensor mounted on the target has to pick up a signal from an emitter on the

gun, thus showing that the gun is aimed right. Third, a technician has to watch that no one is too close to the pyro and hold a deadman switch closed. The deadman switch is hardwired to the pyro detonation system for additional security. If all of these conditions are met, the MIDI show-control system sends a message to the laser system to fire off a shot, another message to the pyro system to blow the charge, and a third message to the sound system to play the blast sound effect.

Goggles are worn by the few actors who have to take laser beam hits in the chest. "Hitting the chest is a large tar-

get area," says Oliver. "Potentially, you could hit someone someplace else other than right there, but you couldn't get by their chest into the audience—but you could still possibly get into their face, so that was a concern." The IR receivers on the actors were tapped into the MIDI system via an RF link.

Surprisingly, one of the biggest problems was getting the actors to hit the targets. "They had to go through some fairly good target practice to learn how to hit something," says Oliver. "That was almost more of a challenge than just making the thing work safety-wise."

**GEORGE LUCAS' SUPER LIVE ADVENTURE**

Executive producer: Kenneth Field  
 Director/supervising producer: Scott Faris  
 Choreographer: Danny Herman  
 Fight choreographer: B.H. Barry  
 Production designer: Douglas W. Schmidt  
 Costume designer: Frank Krenz  
 Lighting designer: Marilyn Lowey  
 Sound designer: Jonathan Deans  
 Stunt coordinator: Steve Kelso  
 Technical supervisor: Olan Cottrill  
 Stage manager: Dale Kaufman  
 Technical director: J.T. Tomlinson  
 Unit controller: Mario Rosso  
 Director of international transportation: Jim Chakedis  
 Assistant stage managers: Greg Schnauel, Max Zurfleuh  
 Head carpenter: Todd Toresdahl  
 Head electrician: Keith Bennett  
 Head wardrobe: Marilyn Attarian  
 Head Morpheus: Kelley Lapping  
 Carpenters: Albert Kent, Richard Connell, Bradley Brown, William Wendlandt  
 Show control: J. Owen Henderson  
 Props: Miron Krukowski  
 Laser system: Barrie Ryan  
 Pyrotechnics: Greg Golden  
 Atmospheric: John Bauer  
 Head sound: Rick Mozo  
 Sound: Todd Goldstein  
 Wardrobe: Patricia Peek  
 Morpheus: Pete Campbell, Troy Garcia, Dave Whalen

Atmospheric design: J.C. Brotherhood  
 Illusion design: David Mendoza  
 Pyrotechnics design: Ian O'Conner  
 Projection system design: Larry Polla  
 Show control system design: Damon Wootten  
 Assistant sound designer: Francis Bergeron  
 Costume assistant: Marc Borders  
 Assistant lighting designer: Garrett Cain  
 Assistant production designer: Craig Edelbut  
 Assistant costume designer: James P. Hammer  
 Assistant to the director: Anna Lundell  
 Assistant lighting designer: Nany Shaw  
 Film production and transfer supervisor: Robert A. Supino

Costumes by Parsons-Meares Ltd., Eaves-Brooks Costume Manufacturing Corp., Euro Co., Michael-Jon Costumes, Inc. Decking by Hudson Scenic Studios, Inc., Illusions and Scenery by Magcraft Design & Fabrication Group. Inflatable scenery by Bigger Than Life, Inc. Laser system by Image Engineering Corp. Lighting and truss by Morpheus Lights, Inc. Projection equipment by Hi-Tech Theatre Equipment, Inc. Props, scenery, costumes by Hagenbeck-Wallace, Inc. Proscenium truss by ECTS Scenic Technology, Inc. Puppets by Michael Curry. Scenery constructed and painted by San Diego Opera Association. Telescan by Obie's Lighting Production, Inc. Temple dogs by Art. Sculpture and Production, Inc. Truss and tracks by Tait Towers, Inc.